



August, 2018 *In The Know* Summary

ORIGINALS

How Non-Conformists Move the World

by Adam Grant

What Did We Discuss?

[Jerry Edgley](#) led a discussion about the book [Originals](#) by [Adam Grant](#). The book talks about fostering creativity and innovation in yourself and your work culture—and how leaders can build cultures that welcome dissent.

Defining “Originality”

‘Originality’ is introducing and advancing an idea that is relatively unusual within a particular domain and that has the potential to improve it. ‘Originals’ are people who take the initiative to make their vision a reality.

Common Pitfalls & Challenges

- The people who suffer the most from a given state of affairs are the least likely to question, challenge, reject, or change it.
- If you are very focused on something, you may not see the broader perspective.
- One of the barriers to creativity is not generating ideas, it's selecting the one idea to pursue.
- If you are an expert in one domain, and then transition to another where you have less expertise, you may be at risk for being over confident.

Notion of “Destructive Creativity”

- Creativity involves looking at a process and “seeing” it differently. Originality can be an act of creative destruction. Advocating for a new system often requires demolishing the old way of doing things, and we may hold back disruptive ideas for the fear of rocking the boat.
- Thomas Jefferson: “Swim with the current, but on matters of principle stand like a rock.”
- The [Warby Parker](#) eyeglass company is one successful example featured in the book. The web-based company offers an online quiz for customers to define their eyeglass style, and then sends prospective customers sample glasses to try out—free shipping for frames both ways and no commitment to purchase.
- People who develop criteria for evaluating ideas first are more successful than those who develop something (a product or service) and hope people want it. (Need to identify the need first.)

Key Concepts from the Book

- Entrepreneurs tiptoe to the edge. And look over it. They don't jump over, i.e., don't abandon their day jobs/livelihood. They mitigate risk and keep a safety net.
- Prototyping is a way of mitigating risk. Focus groups are not the best way to test product because they introduce bias.

- Creativity does not necessarily mean you are starting a new company; a “small” change could be innovative.
- To be creative, you have to be broad and deep in your knowledge.
- Procrastination may be the enemy of productivity, but it can be a resource for creativity. When we plan well in advance, we often stick to the structure we have created and close the door to creative possibilities making gradual progress (testing and refining different possibilities).
- Birth order matters. First borns are trained for leadership. Later borns are more inclined to endorse new ideas and twice as likely as firstborn to champion major scientific upheavals.
- Bridgewater: A workplace culture where you can challenge the CEO. Culture supports originals.

Discussion Highlights

- What holds you back from being more entrepreneurial?
 - Notion that entrepreneurship is for “younger” people.
 - Do not want to give up routine or comforts, and the perception is that you must in order to try something new, i.e., take on a side project on top of already busy schedule.
 - Fear of failure.
 - Need to prioritize what (even exciting idea) is worth the energy.
 - Sometimes organizational cultures limit new ideas; sometimes you don’t have the personal support needed to help push an idea forward.
- Important to encourage dissent—and openly discuss alternatives. One participant’s boss would ask people randomly to share the best argument for why something is not a viable idea. If you implement this technique, you must NOT SHUT DOWN the “devil’s advocate.” Instead, celebrate the proposed bad idea, declare it a “good” bad idea, and create safety for healthy debate.
- How to win support for your ideas? (Within an organization.) Build a track record gradually. Start small, show wins, then continue when you get momentum.

Related Resources

- [Review Laura Mendelow’s Blogs](#)
- [Old in Art School](#) by Nell Painter, author pursued BFA in her 60s
- [TED Talk](#) by Adam Grant
- [Blindspots, Bias, Billionaires, and Bridgewater](#) (Podcast)

*The Chesapeake Bay Organizational Development Network (CBODN) Book Club is a monthly session, open to all learners. Each month, a presenter shares highlights from a book related to leadership, business, or coaching. There’s no obligation to pre-read the book. The session summary is intended to provide a recap of the conversation at Book Club, rather than serve as a thorough book summary. [Register here](#) for upcoming events. For a listing of Book Club summaries, [click here](#).